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Economic and Social Council

Provisional

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Substantive session of 2008
High-level segment

Provisional summary record of the 20th meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Thursday, 3 July 2008, at 7.15 p.m.

President: Mr. Mérorès ..... (Haiti)

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The meeting was called to order at 7.15 p.m.

High-level segment

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Adoption of the ministerial declaration (E/2008/L.10)

1. **The President** said that, throughout the long and delicate process of discussing the draft ministerial declaration, the Bureau had reminded members of the ideals of the strengthened Council and the need to reach agreement. Introducing an editorial correction to paragraph 18 of the draft text (E/2008/L.10), he said that the phrase "Consideration of commitments for subsequent periods for Parties included in Annex I to the Convention under Article 3, paragraph 9, of the Kyoto Protocol" which had erroneously been placed in the body of the text, should be moved to a footnote.

2. *The ministerial declaration (E/2008/L.10), as orally corrected, was adopted.*

3. **Mr. Dapkiunas** (Belarus) said that, while his delegation agreed fully with the spirit of the ministerial declaration, it was unable to agree entirely with its content. As it was important for the activities of the Organization to reflect the interests and requirements of each group of Member States, those groups should be clearly and accurately categorized.

4. The Member States with economies in transition, while few in number, were an inseparable part of the global social, economic and trading fabric and many had been seriously affected by challenges such as climate change and the food crisis. The ministerial declaration unfortunately failed to take full and appropriate account of those States' needs, particularly when it simply reproduced the wording of previously agreed documents. Reference to such precedents risked understating the social and economic difficulties which many regions faced.

5. Although there were intermittent references in the ministerial declaration to States with economies in transition, they were not adequately incorporated or followed up. The time had come to address the difficult issue of the concerns of that group, particularly in the context of the Follow-up International Conference on Financing for Development to Review the Implementation of the Monterrey Consensus (Doha Review Conference) and the Accra Agenda for Action to be submitted for endorsement at the Third High-Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness. The Council could play a positive role in that regard.

6. **Mr. Ripert** (France), speaking on behalf of the European Union, said that it was important for the Council, in strengthened form, to have been able to agree on a ministerial declaration. The European Union would carry forward to the remainder of the substantive session the constructive spirit that had made that agreement possible.

7. **Mr. Blake** (Observer for Antigua and Barbuda), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that the adoption of the ministerial declaration was evidence of the successful revitalization and new dynamism of the Council, which included new institutions in the form of an annual ministerial review and a Development Cooperation Forum.

8. While all the delegations had been flexible in the long process of agreeing on the draft declaration, the Group believed that the developing countries had been obliged to show more than their fair share of flexibility. The Group had found it impossible to gain acceptance of a minor amendment which would have lessened its discomfort with the draft, but had not persevered, out of belief in a strong and united Council.

9. The international community was faced with extraordinary times requiring extraordinary responses. In the light of the number, depth and complexity of the current crises, and the nature of intentions expressed in meetings of the Council, the Group had expected more of the declaration. However, many of its proposals had failed to be accommodated not because of their substance, but because they threatened to make the declaration too long, because no agreed language from past resolutions and declarations was available or because the subject of a particular proposal was being taken up in some other forum.

10. The matters not raised included the transfer of technology in the context of climate change, even

though technology was a significant factor in the problem and the solution to the problem. Food security had been given scant consideration. Trade had barely been mentioned, despite the slow pace of progress in the Doha Round of trade negotiations. Debt would not be considered in detail until the implementation of the Monterrey Consensus was reviewed. However, such concerns lay at the core of development and were critical to achieving the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals, and to implementing the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits.

11. **Mr. Siles Alvarado** (Bolivia) said that his delegation welcomed the ministerial declaration but regretted its shortcomings. In some cases, the hours of discussion involved in reaching a consensus had been counterproductive, and the Council had shown a lack of foresight. Through lack of foresight, the unbridled consumption of polluting sources of energy since the industrial revolution had led to life-threatening climate change. Lack of foresight should not result in history repeating itself. The insatiable demand for energy of countries whose way of life was to plunder natural resources had led them on a search for new fuels, including biofuels. Concerned that a dangerous food crisis would result, his delegation was disappointed with the language contained in paragraph 21 of the declaration, but for the sake of unity within the Council and in the hope that rational dialogue would prevail, it had not withheld its agreement.

12. **Mr. Heidt** (United States of America) said that his delegation welcomed the ministerial declaration, which had been the product of constructive engagement and compromise. The result was in full accordance with the philosophy of a strengthened Council. However, in an approach which weakened its reputation and role, the Council had hastily reused agreed language from other sources in the declaration. The declaration would have been much more effective, and had a greater impact on the development community, had it been shorter and more focused on contemporary challenges. That should be borne in mind for the next high-level segment.

13. Also of concern was the attempt by some partners to exploit the ministerial declaration to prejudge important ongoing negotiations in other forums or reinterpret recently concluded international agreements. Such an approach was unrealistic and devalued the Council. The significance of the ministerial declaration lay in its ability to express, in a way appropriate for a high-level event, the views of the international community on key development issues. Neither the Council nor the declaration could be expected to solve multiple, complex problems being debated by experts around the world.

14. Regarding the substance of the declaration, his delegation wished to restate that it understood the phrase "right to development" in paragraph 33 of the declaration as meaning individuals' rights to develop their intellectual or other capacities to the fullest, and thereby to exercise a full range of civil and political rights. In connection with the terms "inequality" and "inequalities", as used in paragraphs 1 and 30 of the declaration, the United States, through long experience, believed that the emphasis in public policy should be on equality of opportunity, so that each citizen could achieve his or her full potential. In the United States and elsewhere, efforts to equalize income or wealth had had little success.

15. **Mr. Rosales Díaz** (Observer for Nicaragua) said that, while his delegation acknowledged the strong leadership shown in the current Economic and Social Council session, it wished to stress the need for flexibility from all Member States, not just the majority. On numerous occasions, certain delegations had tried to renegotiate or revise previous agreements in an insidious and underhand manner and the Group of 77 and China had encountered a wall of inflexibility on topics that were of crucial importance to its members, such as official development assistance, climate change, debt, energy and the food crisis. There was therefore clearly a need to strengthen the democratization of the United Nations and to continue strengthening the Council. His delegation had joined the consensus on the ministerial declaration in recognition of the President's work and in order to preserve the unity of the Group of 77 and China.

16. **Ms. Pérez Álvarez** (Cuba) said that her delegation, while acknowledging the importance of the Council's adoption of a negotiated document, considered that the content of the ministerial declaration was weak in some respects due to the positions taken by the countries of the North. The global food crisis was the result of major systemic imbalances in the international economic order, and had been made worse, among other factors, by the irresponsible actions of developed countries, particularly the United States and Europe, in diverting

grain into biofuel production. The achievement of the MDGs, particularly the elimination of hunger and poverty, was therefore in jeopardy.

Closure of the high-level segment

17. **The President**, in his closing remarks, said that the Economic and Social Council had come to the end of a remarkable high-level segment. The Council had finally set in motion the new functions mandated by the Heads of State at the 2005 World Summit and the level and breadth of engagement had been extraordinary, with a new wave of enthusiasm and determination in evidence. Despite some divergences of views, the ministerial declaration, embodying the new spirit of the Economic and Social Council, had been adopted. Issues of crucial importance for the future of humanity had been discussed and, although the Council could not hope to find immediate solutions to all of them, at least they had been brought to the attention of the international community and political leaders. Providing a coherent, coordinated and collective response to the challenges that threatened progress towards the Millennium Development Goals required greater commitment from the international community and the will to go beyond political divisions, in the hope of achieving those Goals to the benefit of the most vulnerable peoples and least developed countries.

The meeting rose at 8 p.m.